then nominated by the president, but are likewise approved and called by the higher level. They are designated first and second counselors to establish relative authority and areas of responsibility. The president makes specific assignments to counselors, but in general they assist and support the president in gathering information, analyzing problems, making decisions, and implementing programs.

Decision making in a presidency is not a democratic voting process. The counselors sit in council with the president and give counsel, but the president is responsible to make decisions and to work for unanimity if it has not already been reached. Counselors are similar to a vice-president or assistant administrator except that they do not have independent decision-making power for organizational subunits. The two most common presidencies in the Church, the stake presidency and the ward bishopric, call or release all individuals in positions under their jurisdiction, usually in consultation with the appropriate priesthood quorum or auxiliary presidency. When a president is released, the counselors are automatically also released.

A statement representative of the responsibilities of a president contained in the Doctrine and Covenants includes sitting in council with members, teaching them, edifying them, and presiding over the organization (D&C 107:79–95). The LDS presidency model ensures that no one administrator is responsible alone but always has others who share the burden and perspective of the office and in most matters can act in the president’s absence. The authority of the president is clear, but the shared responsibility adds strength and assistance and provides an opportunity for individual development, which is helpful for future leadership.

J. Bonner Ritchie

PRESIDENT OF THE CHURCH

The President of the Church is the Prophet, Seer, and Revelator who is authorized to direct the affairs of the Church throughout the earth. He speaks and acts under divine guidance from Jesus Christ, who is the Head of the Church. Presidents of the Church to 1991 have been Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, John Taylor, Wilford Woodruff, Lorenzo Snow, Joseph F. Smith, Heber J. Grant, George Albert Smith, David O. McKay, Joseph Fielding Smith, Harold B. Lee, Spencer W. Kimball, and Ezra Taft Benson.

In principle and in practice, no other office or calling elicits the same love and respect from Church members as the President of the Church. The President is the Prophet and, as such, is revered by the members of the Church. He is the only person in the Church who may direct and authorize all uses of the keys of the priesthood. He is the chief administrative officer in the Church, assisted by his counselors in the first presidency and the members of the quorum of the twelve apostles. They direct the work of other general authorities and the lay leaders of the Church serving in hundreds of callings.

The Doctrine and Covenants specifies that the President’s duty is “to be like unto Moses” (D&C 107:91–92; 28:2), relaying the will of God to his people and teaching them the gospel. His work is somewhat analogous to that of Peter, who presided over the apostles and the early Christian Church. In response to Peter’s affirmation that Jesus was the son of God, Jesus pointed out that the testimony had been divinely revealed to Peter, saying, “Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church” (Matt. 16:13–20). Latter-day Saints understand the “rock” to be the divine revelation through which ancient and modern prophets have directed the membership of Christ’s Church (TPJS, p. 274).

Latter-day Saints believe that there is need for revealed knowledge from God to direct the affairs of the Church and provide insight into God’s will today just as there was ancienly. Revelations to the President of the Church may include declaration or clarification of doctrines or direction concerning theological issues, organizational matters, moral conduct, and practical administration. The unity of the Church worldwide is enhanced by the prophet of the Church as God’s spokesperson. As such, the President may speak authoritatively on such matters as scriptural interpretation, spiritual concerns, and temporal issues. His official statements in his time may take precedence over revelations in scripture pertinent to other times or over statements by previous presidents of the Church, though in fact these rarely are in conflict (cf. Benson, pp. 27–28).

The President possesses the inspired capacity to discern between truth and error for the Church. Consequently, he may recognize and denounce
mistaken beliefs and movements within the Church and in the world. While it is understood that he may at times speak or act as a private person outside his calling as prophet (TPJS, p. 278), the general view is that the counsel of the President of the Church is always to be taken seriously.

Whenever new doctrines are to be introduced, they are first presented by the President to his counselors and then to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in a meeting of the Council of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. If unanimously approved, they are then presented to the membership of the Church at a general conference for a sustaining vote.

Latter-day Saints are counseled that following the prophet is wise, even in personal matters (see Following the Brethren). The President of the Church, as prophet, will never be allowed by the Lord to lead members of the Church into apostasy or error (D&C, Official Declaration—1).

The President of the Church is the only person on earth who directs the use of all the keys of the priesthood, though these keys are held also by the ordained apostles and are directed by their quorum upon the death of the President and until a new First Presidency is organized. This means that the President holds the power and authority to govern and direct all of the Lord’s affairs on earth in the Church. All worthy males in the Church who are twelve years of age or older may also be given privileges and powers appropriate to various offices of the priesthood, but every act performed under this authority must be exercised in the proper way. The power to direct these acts at any level is called the keys of the priesthood. Although all the keys are exercised by the President alone, he delegates the use of some of them to other leaders under his direction. The authority to perform ordinances and teach the gospel comes from the Lord, but the orderly use thereof is regulated by those holding keys given to Joseph Smith and passed on to his successors (D&C 1:38; 28:2; see also Melchizedek Priesthood: Restoration of).

Instituted through revelation, the position or calling of President of the Church has developed together with the organization of the Church as a whole. Prior to the official organization of the Church in 1830, Joseph Smith held the central leadership role as prophet of the restoration. In a revelation given on May 15, 1829, Joseph Smith was instructed that he and Oliver Cowdery should be ordained the first and second elders when the Church was formally organized (JS—H 1:72). This took place on April 6, 1830.

During the organizational meeting, Joseph Smith received a revelation in which he was given the titles of seer, translator, prophet, apostle of Jesus Christ, and elder of the Church of Jesus Christ. He was also told how to lay the foundation of the Church (D&C 21:1–2). Those present at the first meeting voted unanimously to accept Joseph Smith as first elder and prophet. At this meeting the fundamental precedent for Church government was established: Callings, including that of prophet, require that the mind and will of God be made manifest and that the will and consent of the
people to abide by it be indicated through a sustaining vote (see Common Consent).

While the Church was in its early years, Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery, and a small group of elders met quarterly and made basic policy decisions for the Church. In September 1830 the uniqueness of Joseph Smith’s position in the Church was affirmed when Hiram Page, a member of the Church, claimed to have received revelations for the Church. Joseph Smith inquired of the Lord and received a clarifying revelation that he alone was to receive commandments and revelations for the entire Church (D&C 28:2, 11–14).

In January 1832, at a small conference of elders in Amherst, Ohio, Joseph Smith was sustained as President of the High Priesthood and ordained to that office by Sidney Rigdon. In March of that same year, the office of President of the Church was further elaborated by the announcement of the organization of a Presidency to consist of a President and counselors (D&C 81:1–3). On April 26, 1832, a general conference of the Church was held in Jackson County, Missouri, where Joseph Smith was sustained and acknowledged as President of the High Priesthood.

Presidents of the Church serve for life and are not released because of age or health. The authority to designate a successor, after receiving revelation from the Lord, rests in the hands of the Twelve, who meet for that purpose after the death of the President. Once a new president has been designated and approved by the unanimous vote of the apostles, he selects his counselors, who are also sustained by the Twelve. These actions are then sustained by the Church membership at the next general conference.

The procedures of succession in the presidency have developed gradually since the organization of the Church. After the Prophet Joseph Smith was assassinated, some members thought his counselor, or even his son, should be his successor; but the Twelve knew that they held the keys and that the senior apostle should preside. Accordingly, Brigham Young, the president of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, led the Church from that position for three and a half years until he was installed and sustained with counselors as a First Presidency. The next two Presidents were also ordained after about the same lapse of time; but since 1898 the succession process has been invoked without delay after the death of a President.

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J. Lynn England
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PRESIDING BISHORIC
The Presiding Bishopric consists of three men, the Presiding Bishop and his two counselors, who comprise one of the presiding councils of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. These general authorities, who each hold the office of bishop, serve in their positions under the direct supervision of the First Presidency. Since its formation, the Presiding Bishopric has been responsible for many of the temporal affairs of the Church. These have included involvement in receiving, distributing, and accounting for member tithes, offerings, and contributions; administration of programs to assist the poor and needy; design, construction, and maintenance of places of worship; and auditing and transferring records of membership (see Bishop, History of the Office; Financial Contributions; Record Keeping; Welfare). Men chosen to be Presiding Bishops have been recognized for their business and management skills as well as their religious commitment. Historically, the Presiding Bishopric has presided over the Aaronic Priesthood. As General Authorities, members of the Presiding Bishopric regularly speak at general conferences, often specifically addressing the young men of the Church.

The Presiding Bishop is selected by the First Presidency and then approved by the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. He chooses two men to serve as his counselors, who are also approved by the First Presidency and the Quorum of the